Cancer treatment is a challenging and difficult time for patients and their caregivers. Relaxation techniques, guided imagery, and meditation can be used to reduce anxiety and stress. Many people use these techniques to calm the mind and reduce the stress caused by cancer. Learning to use these techniques will empower you to better cope with the stressors of your journey.

In this section you will:
- Learn stress reduction strategies such as deep breathing, meditation and guided imagery.
- Participate in a relaxation and stress management exercise.
- Become aware of individual stressors and recognize opportunities to utilize relaxation and stress management techniques.

Check your guided imagery and meditation knowledge:
- Check what you know about guided imagery & meditation before you review this section.
- When you are done with this section, please take this same test again. You will find a second copy and answers at the end of this section.
- You will then be able to compare your answers and see how much you have learned.

Directions: Please select the answer (True or False) which you believe to be correct.

1. There is no way to reduce the stress of going through cancer.  
   True  False
   T      F

2. The cancer patient is the only one who experiences stress.  
   True  False
   T      F

3. Cancer patients cannot identify personal stressors and cope with them.  
   True  False
   T      F

4. It is possible to calm your mind and body with relaxation techniques.  
   True  False
   T      F
Stress during the cancer journey:

Stress describes what people feel when they are under mental, physical, or emotional pressure.

Stress can be caused by daily responsibilities and routine events, as well as by more unusual events, such as a trauma or illness in oneself or a close family member. When people feel that they are unable to manage or control changes caused by cancer or normal life activities, they are experiencing distress. Distress has become increasingly recognized as a factor that can reduce the quality of life of cancer patients.

Saying that you are distressed can mean that you feel:

- Sad
- Hopeless
- Powerless
- Afraid
- Guilty
- Anxious
- Panic
- Discouraged
- Depressed
- Uncertain

Early physical symptoms of stress may include tension, headaches, sleep problems, and weight changes. Long-term stress has been found to suppress the immune system.

A certain amount of distress is normal when you or a loved one has cancer. This distress is caused, in part, because of the attitudes and fears people have about cancer.

Everything about dealing with cancer is stressful. Dealing with the side effects of treatment – such as tiredness (fatigue), hair loss, weight changes, and how disrupted your life seems – is also stressful. But sometimes distress can go from the expected level to one that interferes with your treatment, makes it hard for you to cope with the illness, and affects all parts of your life.

The stress of caregiving can also take a serious toll on the emotional and physical health of caregivers. Emotional effects tend to show up first. You may feel worried and anxious, for example, or irritable – more likely to snap or overreact to things that might not normally bother you. It’s important to seek support early.

People who are able to use effective coping strategies to deal with stress, such as relaxation and stress management techniques, have been shown to have lower levels of depression, anxiety, and symptoms related to the cancer and its treatment.
EMBRACE Your Journey
Guided Imagery and Meditation

Identifying your personal stressors:

**Three things that are stressful to me:**

1._______________________________________________
2._______________________________________________
3._______________________________________________

**Three things I do to cope with these stressors:**

1._______________________________________________
2._______________________________________________
3._______________________________________________

**Becoming aware:**

- How are my coping strategies helping my stress level?
- Identify a situation in which you could use one of your coping techniques.
- Are you open to learning additional techniques to cope with stress?
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Guided Imagery and Meditation

Deep Breathing

At the core of life is breath. Laughing and sighing are the body’s natural ways of getting us to breathe deeply. That is why we often feel calmer or rejuvenated after these experiences.

Anxiety and stress can make us take short, shallow breaths. Shallow breathing, which does not allow enough oxygen to enter our bodies, can make us even more anxious.

Try this four-step breathing exercise.

It can be done anywhere, anytime:

1. **Take in a deep breath from your diaphragm (this is the muscle between your lungs and abdomen).**

2. **Hold the breath for several seconds—however long is comfortable for you—and then exhale slowly.**

3. **Repeat steps 1 and 2 two more times.**

4. **Afterward, relax for a moment and let yourself feel the experience of being calm.**
Embrace Your Journey
Guided Imagery and Meditation

Mediation

Repetitive prayers are a form of meditation. Two other traditional forms of meditation include one-pointed and two-pointed meditation.

One-pointed meditation focuses on a word or sound called a mantra. Many people create their own mantra from an affirming word, such as “peace,” “love” or “hope.” Once you choose a mantra, find a safe, quiet place, and repeat it to yourself during 15- to 20-minute sittings. The goal is to relax the mind, which has a natural tendency to jump from one idea to the next—and from one worry to the next. Do not try to force your mind back to your mantra when you notice it has wandered. Simply guide it back gently, accepting that it may stray again.

Two-pointed meditation is also called mindful or insight meditation. With this technique, you relax your mind by focusing on your breath. As your mind jumps around, practice non-judgmental awareness—simply observe the pattern of your thoughts and gently guide them back to focus on your breath. Non-judgmental awareness allows you to separate yourself from emotions and sensations rather than getting pulled into them. One benefit of this type of meditation is that you can practice it while seated quietly or when doing daily activities.

Guided Imagery

This stress-reducing technique combines deep breathing and meditation. As you practice deep breathing, imagine a peaceful scene or setting, perhaps from a memory. Once you are relaxed, you can create a “wakeful dream” in which, for example, you envision pain being washed away or your body becoming stronger.

Many people practice guided imagery exercises while listening to recordings of ambient sounds. These are usually music or sounds from nature, such as waterfalls or ocean waves. Sometimes just listening to ambient sounds is enough to relax your mind and briefly transport you emotionally to a place in which you feel safer and more secure. Other mind/body practices are yoga, tai chi, and Qigong. These techniques are often taught at health clubs, YMCA/YWCA, and senior centers around the country.
EMBRACE Your Journey
Guided Imagery and Meditation

TRIP TO THE BEACH: Guided Imagery Script

Take a deep, slow breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Keep breathing in and out, focusing on how your body feels at this moment. Feel the pace of your heart and lungs becoming slower. With each breath, breathe IN relaxation and breathe OUT tension and tiredness. Feel your body sinking more and more into deep relaxation.

You decide to go for a walk along the beach. The sun is radiating warmth and comfort as it shines boldly. The grains of sand beneath your feet shine from the sunlight and warm the soles of your feet. The sound of the waves beating against the shore echoes in the air.

You feel the warm, light breeze brush against your faces as you walk onward. Far off in the distance, you can hear the cries of sea gulls...You watch them glide through the sky, swoop down into the sea, and then fly off once again.

As you walk further along the shore, you decide to rest. You sit down on a mound of pure white sand and gaze out at the sea, staring intently at the rhythmic, methodical motion of the waves rolling into shore.

As you stare off into the distance, you see that the sun is beginning to sink into the horizon. The sky is turning brilliant colors ...while the sun sets, sinking down...down into the horizon. You feel very relaxed and soothed. You continue to watch the sun as it descends.

The beating of the waves, the smell and taste of the sea, the salt, the cries of the gulls, the warmth against your body – all of these sights, sounds, and smells leave you feeling very calm, refreshed, and relaxed.

For a moment let yourself drift...For a moment be aware of how deeply relaxed your mind and body feel right now...Remind yourself that you can create these feelings on your own during your daily activities.

Remember that periodically during any day you may scan your body, discover any tension you are holding and then inhale relaxation and exhale the tension and tightness. Come back to this place as often as you like or create your own getaway. Relax – renew – recharge your mind and body.
EMBRACE Your Journey
Guided Imagery and Meditation

TRIP TO THE RIVER: Guided Imagery Script

Sit comfortably with your back straight... Focus on your breathing... Notice your breath flowing in and out... Slowly and rhythmically... As you focus on your breathing...close your eyes... And continue to breathe slowly and deeply... Gradually relax deeper and deeper.

You are relaxing... And as you breathe slowly, deeply and naturally... Feel the chatter of your mind become calm and quiet. Feel your mind become clear and spacious... As spacious as the sky... Your thoughts are like puffy clouds, Drifting in and out ...in and out... Until finally, you have no thoughts left... Your mind is clear and spacious...as you breathe deeply.

Your mind is free and clear ...it is open... and empty... There are no thoughts intruding in your mind... As you listen to my voice... It is your time to be quiet now... Time to be carried along with this daydream.

Imagine a deep, wide, slowly moving river... Place yourself in the middle of the current... Peering up into the sky... As if the water were holding you there motionless...

Feel the current moving slowly past your ears...neck... Chest...stomach...waist...legs...and feet... So that you become part of the swaying current.

Hear the unique underwater sounds... The water gently rolling over the rocks... The sand rushing through the water... And your legs swaying back and forth with the current.

As the water continues to support your body... Notice your tension releasing itself into the stream. Concentrate not on staying afloat or staying in place... But only on letting go of your body’s tension... And drifting with the current of the stream... Feel how light your body is at this time... How relaxed....how peaceful you feel.

Know that the very fact you have imagined your tension floating Away with the stream’s current makes it possible and real... Your tension has been released... And you feel light and relaxed... Tell yourself this now.

You will bring back this good feeling... This feeling of lightness and relaxation. When you are ready... Open your eyes slowly...and let in the sight of your surroundings.
EMBRACE Your Journey
Guided Imagery and Meditation

Early Morning Walk: Guided Imagery Script

As you prepare to take an imaginary walk through a meadow, take a deep breath (the kind you would take if you were outdoors on a clear, invigorating morning) and, as you exhale, allow your muscles to feel relaxed and loose and notice the quieting sensation of your hands at rest. Relax a little more by noticing your feet and how they feel within your shoes and stockings or how they feel if you do not have them covered. Allow your body to be fully supported and relax your muscles even more.

And now, I invite you to imagine that it is almost dawn and you have camped in a beautiful meadow next to a vast and ancient forest. You are absolutely safe here.

As the night’s darkness gradually lightens, you listen to the calls of the early rising birds and wonder what creatures you will see in the forest. You feel an almost primitive joy in anticipation of spending time with nature’s bounty.

Feeling refreshed by the slight chill in the early morning air, you take a deep breath and quickly get dressed. You fix your breakfast and a sandwich for lunch. Then, pulling a light day pack onto your shoulders, you leave your camping spot and follow a path that leads across the meadow. Looking up, you watch a flock of geese as they fly wing-tip to wing-tip in formation across the sky. Behind them small white clouds dissolve into blue space.

As you begin walking along the trail and look out across the meadow, the early dew sparkles on purple stalks of lupine, blue columbine, white daisies, yellow buttercups and bright orange poppies. The wildflowers in the tall yellow green grass contrast sharply with the deeper greens and browns of the forest.

And then your attention is drawn to what appears to be a grand entrance to the forest with leafy sentinels growing on either side of the trail. The smaller guards are tall fern which grow in dense clumps, attended by an occasional wild iris. They are flanked by quaking aspen with shimmering leaves. Imagine what it would be like to stand in the middle of the meadow, taking in the sights and sounds and smells of nature. If you would like, you could imagine you follow the path and walk into the forest.

When you have finished wandering through scenes in your inner landscape, gently open your eyes noticing how your imagination was able to use your past experience to create a mini-vacation and bringing with you whatever you need to remember today from this experience.
Personal contract for guided imagery & meditation:

Finally, make a contract with yourself regarding how you will engage in guided imagery & meditation activities. Place a check mark next to each statement that you are going to follow or put your own statement in the blanks provided.

1. I will try to use effective coping strategies to deal with my stress.
   ______ I will focus my attention on reducing my stress levels.
   ______ I will use_______________ to cope with my stress.
   ______ I will decrease by stress by using________________________.
   I will evaluate my progress on ________________ (date).

2. I will try to use the following techniques to assist me with my feelings associated with things that are out of my control.
   ______ I will use guided imagery to reduce my anxiety.
   ______ I will use meditation to reduce my anxiety.
   ______ I will use ________________ to reduce my anxiety.
   I will evaluate my progress on ________________ (date).

Signed: ___________________________       Date: ________________
EMBRACE Your Journey
Guided Imagery and Meditation

Test your guided imagery and mediation knowledge:

- See what you have learned about guided imagery and meditation
- Answers are provided at the end of this section

Directions: Please select the answer (True or False) which you believe to be correct.

1. There is no way to reduce the stress of going through cancer.  
   True  False
   T       F

2. The cancer patient is the only one who experiences stress.  
   True  False
   T       F

3. Cancer patients cannot identify personal stressors and cope with them.  
   True  False
   T       F

4. It is possible to calm your mind and body with relaxation techniques.  
   True  False
   T       F

Directions: Compare your test answers to the correct answers listed below:

1. F
2. F
3. F
4. T